



01



02

## WAY TO WORK —Sydney

### Preface

The new breed of worker not tied to a desk is driving a change for buildings to be more than just a fixed space to house employees. Sydney is forging ahead with the trend and highlights the best in agile and creative office space.

### WRITER

*Carli Ratcliff*

### PHOTOGRAPHER

*Michael Wee*

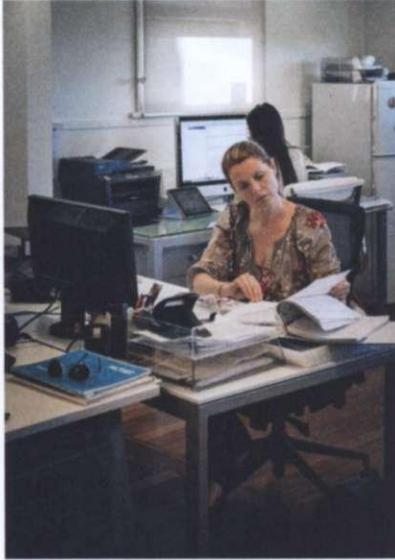
Flexible business environments have become the fresh focus the world over for both freelancers and staffers. What started as an opportunity to reduce rents by sharing office space with others has morphed into a new take on working life. In Sydney a group of architects, interior designers and bespoke furniture manufacturers have risen to the challenge of this new culture. They have set about creating interiors and furnishings that answer to the particular needs of this breed of worker.

Geoff Bailey, executive director of Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, oversaw the renovation of a former First World War hospital and women's army barracks into shared office spaces at Headland Park in Sydney's Georges Heights, on the edge of Sydney Harbour. "We had a strange assortment of buildings and after much public debate we decided we could better enrich the life of this part of the city by repurposing rather than bulldozing them," says Bailey.

Keen to ensure diversity of use, the site is now home to a gym, cafes, a bookbinding service, dance studios and a childcare centre, in addition to mixed offices and studio spaces for artists. "It was important to maintain the heritage of the buildings externally but internally they needed to be open, contemporary and adaptable to ensure that they would appeal to a range of businesses," Bailey



03



04

- 01 Hut 30, Headland Park houses bankers, journalists and various businesses
- 02 Team from Headland Capital
- 03 Working in the sun at Headland Park
- 04 Peta Smithers of Headland Capital
- 05 Frenchy's café
- 06 Michael Auden of Sydney Photography School

- 07 Martin Booker, principal of Headland Capital, has worked here for six years
- 08 Proto Partners' bookshelf
- 09 Conference room at Hut 30
- 10 Artist Ashley Morgan in her studio
- 11 Headland Park's public bathrooms
- 12 Painter Robert Dujin and sculptor Stephen Coburn in their studio



05



06

says. And the long, unadorned spaces, within a series of huts complete with harbour views has aided this cause.

"The sharing of the site and the buildings makes it an interesting place for people to work and to visit," says Bailey. "I love to hear the tinkling of music from the ballet studios as I walk to my office."

Hut 30 is also in earshot of the ballet piano. Formerly a women's army barracks, it houses hedge fund managers, a journalist and lifestyle public relations specialists working side by side.

A Macquarie banker turned sole-trader and investor, Greg Mackay has been working out of Hut 30 for nearly three years. "Sharing an office with experienced people in their respective fields means we can throw ideas around. There is great intellectual capital in the room," he says.

Down the hill in Hut 32 is the Sydney headquarters of customer experience consultancy Proto Partners. Staff work across multiple office and meeting spaces that are also shared with external consultants. "For us being based in a multi-use site and having the permanent use of several spaces means we are not limited by the confines of a traditional office environment," says Damian Kernahan, founder of Proto Partners.

Corporations in Sydney's more traditional office buildings are also embracing greater flexibility. Employees are no longer allocated seating or desktop computers but work instead on mobile devices and sit wherever their activity, for that day or part of the day, is taking place. It may sound happy clappy, but it works.

## Other key co-working hubs:

### **Creative Lounge MOV, Tokyo**

Located in the upper regions of the Hikarie shopping tower in Shibuya, Creative Lounge MOV is a sprawling and buzzy blend of open lounges, meeting rooms and quiet desk areas for between-homes office workers. The space was expertly designed by Kokuyo Furniture Co and Jamo Associates.

### **The Exchange, London**

The Shard next door might have trouble finding tenants but its neighbour The Exchange is a thriving, Vitra-filled den of productivity for small businesses, mixing working, meeting and event spaces with a wonderful restaurant run by Aussie chef Magnus Reid.

### **CoCo, Minneapolis**

A mixture of entrepreneurs and creatives share this unique 1,900 sq m wide open workplace, located on the converted trading floor of the Minneapolis Grain Exchange.



07



08



09



10

Susan Ferrier, KPMG Australia's national head of people, performance and culture (HR), has been overseeing a trial in the firm's Sydney office at Ten Shelley Street. The company has dedicated half a floor to this new way of working, which is known in these parts by the less than snappy **ABW** ('activity based working'). If nothing else, it shows people will always like working around other people. "It has been truly extraordinary for our team," says Ferrier. "There is a lot more spontaneous conversation and collaboration."



11

Nik Karalis is global design director of Woods Bagot, an international design firm. The studio's workload has increased significantly in the area of bespoke headquarters for banks and financial institutions keen to implement the **ABW** model. In conjunction with Clive Wilkinson as architects, the firm designed Macquarie Bank's new Sydney headquarters at One Shelley Street. "Banks are trying to bring more life into their buildings," he says. "They are really trying to remove the shackles of their identity, to base themselves in buildings that respond to the community, and that to some extent, reflect the people they represent."



12

In addition to banks, Woods Bagot has also designed spaces for Sydney's Google office and is working on One William Street, the new HQ for the state government of Queensland. "Even state governments espouse terms like 'community', 'collaboration', 'transparency' and 'authenticity', in their design briefs," says Karalis. "It's taken 10 years for these words to percolate through but we are finally hearing them from the clients themselves." We just hope that behind all the buzzwords there remains some design heft, common sense and genuine care for staff's working habits. In some cases, they may be covering up for brutal realities (ie "We can't afford a bigger office").

"Every now and then office design takes a quantum leap," says Karalis. "In the 1970s it was open-plan on super large floors and now we see alternate working patterns emerging," he says. "Finally we have buildings performing for the business rather than making a business perform around a building."



## Russel Koskela DIRECTOR, *Keskela*

Sydney-based custom furniture studio Keskela has made pieces for co-working and ABW spaces including Hub, KPMG, Macquarie Bank, GPT, SBS Television and Commonwealth Bank in Sydney; National Australia Bank at Docklands, Melbourne; and PwC, Canberra.

**What's the process when designing furniture for an ABW space?**  
*"We meet with the client, architect and interior designers to understand their needs. The crucial requirement is flexibility, everything must be able to be rearranged."*

**How do you answer the need for privacy and address noise levels?**  
*"We have designed pods that sit on the top of the desk, cocooning a person's work space."*

**What is the appeal of un-fixed desks?**  
*"I've heard of companies emailing their staff advising them to only bring personal items that can fit in a shoebox. I've also had clients report that employees arrive earlier to garner their favourite desk. People want that window seat."*